



CHECKING OUR BACKTRAIL

2023 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

Legal and legislative fights filled OHA's card in 2023

Legislative session produced major victories for Oregon's sportsmen's community

While not successful in securing a ballot referendum in the 2023 Oregon Legislative Session to constitutionally protect the right to fish, hunt, harvest, and gather, the sportsmen's community had several major victories.

• **Commission Restructure** - HB 3086, the bill to restructure the map by which ODFW Commissioners are selected, passed in the final hours of the session. The commission was previously aligned to congressional districts plus two at-large positions. The new statute bases all positions in the river basin regions with two commissioners each from the Northwest and West Central Regions, and one commissioner each from the Southwest, North Central, and Eastern Regions. This provides greater representation to the eastern portion of the state and ensures we will no longer have three, or more, commissioners centered in the Portland area.

• **Conservation Funding** - OHA's bill seeking funds for in-state testing for chronic wasting disease was not included in the budget, but there were some financial wins. In addition to \$5 million appropriated for wildlife crossings, the Minam River Wildlife Area Acquisition Phase II funding was approved, and the Mule Deer Coordination position was funded in a permanent status.

Defeating a bad bill is a win in itself. From further restrictions on hunting with hounds and criminalizing fur sales to restrictions of managing predatory animals, the engagement of sportsmen and women around the state were instrumental in defeating or modifying several bills that would have had detrimental outcomes.

• **Gun Control Bills** - The two major gun bills were negotiated when the Senate Republicans returned to the Capitol. HB 2005, which would have restricted so-called "ghost guns," instituted a restriction on firearms ownership and possession, and restricted concealed carry abilities, was reduced to restrictions on home-made firearms. Additionally, SB 348, which would have instituted all components of Measure 114, was effectively shelved.

Oregon Sportsmen's Conservation Partnership proved effective in legislative session

The Oregon Sportsmen's Conservation Partnership proved to be an effective coalition in the 2023 Legislature. The Partnership was formed in January 2022 from the initial group of sportsmen's organizations that began fighting the extreme IP3, which would criminalize hunting, fishing, and trapping, as well as animal agriculture. The Partnership has grown to include 36 wildlife and fisheries organizations and engaged on many conservation topics.

OHA's 2023 Investments in Our Mission

Projects benefiting Oregon's wildlife & sportsmen:	\$270,050
Publications, information & education:	\$264,580
Defending hunting rights/Advocating for wildlife:	\$149,623
Fighting poaching in Oregon:	\$18,019
Volunteer hours donated by OHA members:	30,678

Litigation filed against Measure 114

OHA filed two amicus briefs in early January supporting the Measure 114 lawsuit brought by National Shooting Sports Foundation and Oregon State Shooting Association.

In June, a federal court in Portland ruled that the measure's permit-to-purchase scheme was, in fact, constitutional. That ruling is being appealed at the federal level.

In November, a Harney County judge ruled the measure's provisions violate the state's constitution.

This fight is far from over. From helping to form the opposition campaign against Measure 114 to providing amicus briefs and financial support for federal lawsuits, OHA has been actively fighting the unreasonable restrictions the measure would place on Oregonians. When legislators attempted to subvert the litigation efforts by moving bills forward that would mimic the measure's egregious components, OHA was there to fight them.

IP3 proponents filed IP28 for 2026 ballot

IP3 proponents have gathered over 30,000 signatures in their efforts to put their extremist initiative petition that would ban legal hunting, fishing, and trapping on the 2024 ballot.

In addition to criminalizing hunting, fishing, and trapping, the initiative would also criminalize wildlife management efforts, education and research with animals, and even trapping vermin such as mice and gophers. It would also effectively end farming, ranching.

Even with an influx of funding earlier this year and efforts to gain the signature threshold (120,000) to make the ballot, it appears the proponents are now looking to the 2026 election. Initiative Petition 28 (IP28) has been filed with the Secretary of State for the 2026 ballot and gives them three years to continue their plans to take this extreme agenda to Oregonians.



OHA efforts for conservation make impacts across Oregon

OHA's Conservation Team was busy in 2023 working for on-the-ground habitat restoration and enhancement, as well as influencing important wildlife and land management decisions. OHA focused on conservation priorities across the state in various arenas.

Highlight priorities for 2023

OHA Regional Habitat Projects

OHA hit the ground running with our new and inspiring regional project concept in which multiple OHA chapters work together with state OHA to complete landscape-scale habitat projects across the state. OHA wrapped up a wildfire restoration project and planted nearly 16,000 sage and bitterbrush seedlings on mule deer winter range in the Interstate Unit. OHA, partners, and agency staff built 68 beaver

OHA's Conservation Team of staff, committee members, and volunteers have sought to restore and reclaim recognition that sportsmen and women are our state's premier conservationists.

dam analogs at various locations in the Ochoco Mountains, OHA and ODFW installed nearly 4,000 feet of wildlife-friendly buck-and-pole fencing to protect one of only two aspen stands on White River Wildlife Area, and OHA installed critical wildlife friendly fencing to protect meadow systems in the southwest Cascades.

Weighing in on Mule Deer Issues

OHA has been working to influence the revision of the Mule Deer Management Plan for the benefit of mule deer and hunters. To date, nine draft chapters have been released, including important



OHA volunteers helped construct nearly 4,000 feet of buck-and-pole fence to protect an aspen stand at the White River Wildlife Area on June 10 and 11.

chapters such as Migration, Movements and Habitat Connectivity, Nutrition and Habitat, Predation and Harvest Management. OHA has reviewed these chapters pointing out areas where the plan could be improved. The final draft of the plan is expected to reach completion and Commission approval in 2024.

Pressing for Intensive Wolf Management and Hunting Opportunity

ODFW released its Annual Wolf Report in 2023. Wolf packs in Oregon continue to increase, new sightings and groups of wolves are more common, wolves continue to expand to new areas in Oregon, and impacts to livestock producers continue. OHA has strongly encouraged ODFW to better understand wolf predation on ungulates.

OHA was successful in keeping future hunting and trapping included as management tools during the last wolf plan review, and OHA will work to stop wolf protectionists from stripping wildlife managers of those options in the future.

Public Land Management and Projects

The Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument (CSNM) is in the process of revising the Monument's Resource Management Plan (RMP) and OHA is involved. OHA strongly supported continued use of the CSNM for hunting and suggested managers increase hunting opportunities where possible. OHA urged CSNM managers to create additional early seral habitat for species such as black-tailed deer, elk, and numerous others.

Engaging with Oregon Tribes Following New Agreements with ODFW

OHA is closely watching new agreements between tribes and ODFW. OHA is engaged in conversations with the multiple tribes to address valid concerns of Oregon hunters regarding these new agreements between the tribes and ODFW.

OHA is interested in potential impacts of these agreements on ungulate populations and ODFW management objectives in Oregon, but those won't be known until the tribes' first-year harvest figures are published. If OHA believes that the impacts are substantial, we will engage with the tribes, ODFW, and other entities to share those concerns.

In the long-term, our best approach is to develop and foster relationships with the tribes. The tribes possesses substantial influence at both the state and federal level and now stand on equal footing with ODFW in making management decisions in their service area.

OHA has been advised that the tribes share a similar mindset of increasing deer and elk populations to sustain harvest, and that benefits all hunters.

Tribes are powerful entities that are capable of influencing land management decisions. Without this influence, federal land managers will continue to manage for late seral forests, which indirectly limit deer and elk populations due to reduced forage.

In the policy world, tribal alignment benefits sportsmen in that the tribes do



not align with anti-hunting groups. In many cases, the goals of the tribes, such as hunting and predator management programs, are directly opposed to protectionist agendas.

Elliott State Forest & W. Oregon State Forests Plans and HCP's

OHA played a major role in ensuring public hunting access to the 83,000-acre Elliott State Forest by supporting the preferred alternative, which allows the forest to remain open to public access and hunting for 80 years.

Working to Keep Renewable Energy Facilities off Public Lands

With BLM's Western Solar Plan expansion into Oregon, OHA outlined specific areas and places that solar farms should not be allowed on BLM lands to protect hunting access and habitat. OHA is committed to protecting wildlife habitat on all public lands. Specific impacts from energy development on public lands will be evaluated on a site-by-site basis.

Preventing Spread of CWD

OHA is committed to preventing the spread of CWD to – and ultimately within – our state. OHA encouraged the ODFW Commission to continue its effort to increase CWD funding and awareness. The future support of the Commission and our partners is vital in preventing and ultimately reducing prevalence of the disease.

Testimony at Commission Meetings

OHA testified at ODFW Commission meetings and flagged several wildlife management issues that we will continue to work on into the foreseeable future. OHA was the only organization to testify on game bird regulations at April's ODFW Commission meeting. OHA supported continued controlled sage-grouse hunting that yields critical population information for wildlife managers, supported new youth pheasant hunting opportunities, new turkey hunting opportunities on EE Wilson Wildlife Area, and thanked ODFW for using hunters to mitigate turkey damage. OHA expressed concerns regarding impacts of this change on western Oregon turkey populations that predominantly use public lands, but we will look at the data next year and reassess whether this was a sound science-based decision to maintain quality hunting opportunity on public lands in western Oregon. At the big game regulations Commission meeting, OHA summarized comments and provided



Adults in custody helped raise seedlings for an OHA planting project in a Lake County burn.

in-person testimony pertaining to Rocky Mountain elk populations in northeast Oregon, chronic wasting disease (CWD), mule and black-tailed deer, and cougar.

In general, Rocky Mountain elk populations are doing well in eastern Oregon, but elk populations in some historically renowned elk units appear to be struggling. ODFW data indicate that several units were all well below elk population management objectives in 2022, and therefore need management attention. OHA requested that we begin discussions with the department as to how we can improve elk populations in these areas. Follow-up conversations with ODFW staff have led OHA staff to believe that improving elk populations in the units where elk are struggling is a priority for ODFW, and we look forward to engaging on this issue in the near future.

OHA Doubles Turn-In-Poachers Rewards

OHA doubled down on efforts to fight poaching in Oregon by doubling the rewards paid to informants in fish and game poaching cases through OHA's Turn in Poachers (TIP) reward program. OSP, ODFW and OHA have collaborated on the TIP program, which provides cash rewards to persons who report unlawful killing of wildlife, fish, upland birds, and waterfowl and/or destruction of habitat.

For more, visit oregonhunters.org/turn-in-poachers-tip

Habitat Connectivity/Wildlife Migration

OHA worked tirelessly to improve habitat connectivity and reduce wildlife vehicle collisions. Conservation staff have been involved in wildlife crossing projects across the state including projects on Interstates 5 and 84, and state highways 20, 97, 238, 140, and 26.

Learn to Hunt Program teaches new hunters

The OHA Learn to Hunt Program was officially launched in 2022 with a focus on reaching adult first-time hunters. Since its launch, it has successfully reached hundreds of new students and grown OHA's membership. In several instances, new hunters have become new OHA members and even chapter board members within a year of attending courses.

In 2023, the program expanded beyond the flagship chapter, Hoodview, to include the Pioneer, Lincoln County, and Emerald Valley chapters. Made up of both in-person and online courses and materials, the program is aimed at adults with an interest in learning to hunt.

Supported by generous funding from the Leupold & Stevens Foundation, the Learn to Hunt Program will continue to evolve, providing courses and materials in an effort to bring new hunters into camp.

OHA to create network for women in hunting

Women are the fastest growing demographic in the hunting community and a growing percentage of OHA's membership. As such, OHA is adding a new program to our suite of outreach efforts with the creation of a women's "network."

The Ladies of OHA program will include a comprehensive resource hub specific to women in hunting, such as gear selection, safety concerns, fitness, and many other topics. Events with invited speakers, skills building courses, and Q&A sessions are also planned.

The network will include a strong focus on mentoring. Providing new hunters with mentors who can help them traverse their first hunting experience is a high priority for the new program.

The Ladies of OHA program will launch in January 2024 with a monthly digital newsletter as well as plans for regional clinics and conservation projects. Women who would like to receive the newsletter and information on events are encouraged to email Amy Patrick at amy@oregonhunters.org.

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